



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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BIOLOGICAL SURVEY INVENTORY SHOWS WATERFOWL INCREASE FOR FIFTH YEAR

A general increase in North American waterfowl for the fifth successive year was reported today to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes by the Bureau of Biological Survey, following the compilation of estimates made during the annual midwinter inventory conducted by the Bureau last January.

The 1940 estimates reveal that there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 65 million migratory waterfowl on the continent. These figures represent an increase of around 15 percent in the waterfowl populations since 1939, when some 57 million were reported. The 1940 population, however, is still far below that of 20 years ago, when it is estimated that there were probably twice as many migratory waterfowl on the continent as there are now.

Inventory figures are not detailed counts of waterfowl populations, it was pointed out, but are estimated totals that serve each year to indicate trends in the numbers of wild ducks and geese. The estimates are compiled from reports by trained observers.

A decided lack of uniformity has been noted in the percentage of increase in the four flyways, the major flight lanes followed by migratory birds. As in the past few years, the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways this year included most of the waterfowl. The Central flyway showed a large decrease in all waterfowl, while the status of the birds in the Pacific flyway remained almost at the 1939 level.

Some observers believe that there may have been more or less of a shift of birds from the Central to the Mississippi flyway because of drought in the Great Plains States.

Though Biological Survey officials are apprehensive about results this summer on the northern breeding grounds, where drought threatens to reduce the crop of ducklings, they expressed satisfaction in the general waterfowl situation. The gain in the supply of wild ducks and geese was attributed to sound management. This involves restoration and conservation of waterfowl habitat in breeding, resting, and wintering ranges, coupled with enforced hunting regulations designed to reduce the kill by sportsmen.

Both the United States and Canadian governments are restoring waterfowl habitats on nesting areas in the north, the Federal government directly through the establishment of national wildlife refuges--many of which are in the breeding zone--and the Dominion government indirectly through the prairie farm rehabilitation program.

Inventory Is Nation-wide

Taken in January, the inventory is conducted by a Nation-wide staff of expert observers who use planes, boats, autos, trains, and snowshoes to reach the resting areas where most of the birds are found just before the northern migration begins in spring. The corps of field workers under the leadership of the Biological Survey's regional directors include, in addition to Bureau employees, cooperators from the Army Air Corps, Naval Air Service, Coast Guard, Forest Service, Soil Conservation Service, National Park Service, State forestry and game and fish departments, private agencies, and others.

Since the annual midwinter inventory was inaugurated by the Biological Survey in 1935, Survey officials have been perfecting the system to obtain results

that are as nearly accurate as possible. This year they asserted that the 1940 inventory proved beyond doubt that the system now in use is adequate, pointing out that observers worked under the most trying circumstances in one of the worst cold spells seen in recent years.

Results Analyzed by Species

A break-down of inventory results show that the mallard and the pintail are making the best recovery among the various species of ducks. Black ducks showed a slight decrease, which may have been more apparent than real.

While the population of Canada geese is somewhat greater than last year, Survey officials explained the increase is not so large as was expected. This condition, they stated, may reflect the excessive slaughter of these birds last season in one or two areas.

Canvasbacks, however, have increased satisfactorily. Blue and snow geese have increased considerably since last year. Whistling swans, however, suffered a slight reduction.

Midwinter inventories are preceded by three other seasonal investigations. The northward movement of birds during spring migrations is observed by the Biological Survey's corps of volunteer cooperators stationed throughout the four principal flyways. In fall, the observers note the birds' southward movements. Four naturalists of the Survey, called flyway biologists, conduct summer investigations on the breeding grounds in the northern United States, Canada, and Alaska, and continue their observations of the birds throughout the year. Two of those naturalists regularly spend the winter on investigations in Mexico. The January inventory is the climax of the year's activities in waterfowl population studies.

On the basis of these scientific investigations, Bureau officials recommend the waterfowl hunting regulations to the Secretary of the Interior. Usually, these recommendations are submitted late in June or early in July. Recommendations for regulations, however, will not be drafted until the four flyway biologists report upon conditions in the northern breeding grounds. Present predictions of a poor water supply and the possibility of drought, which would reduce the number of hatched birds that survive, lend a pessimistic note to the situation.

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